



Dear Interested Citizen:

Enclosed you will find for your review a Draft Environmental Assessment for the proposed Cascade County Missouri River Merriam's Turkey Transplant. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks proposes to trap wild Merriam's turkeys from eastern Montana and transplant them to the Missouri River area south of Ulm, Cascade County, Montana. Wild turkeys currently do not inhabit the area. FWP is partnering with area Landowners and the National Wild Turkey Federation on the project. FWP expects that 25-75 turkeys might be initially transplanted, possibly followed by 2-3 subsequent transplants of similar magnitude over a 3-year period. The purpose would be to provide additional wildlife viewing, improve hunting opportunities and increase species diversity in the area.

This draft EA is available for review from Region 4 FWP Headquarters at the address below, or viewed on FWP's Internet website: <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("Recent Public Notices").

Comments will be accepted from November 3 - December 3, 2007 (30 days) and should be mailed to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Attn: Cascade Co. Missouri River Turkey Transplant Proposal
4600 Giant Springs Rd.
Great Falls, MT 59405
(406) 454-5840

or emailed to: cloecker@mt.gov.

If you have questions, please contact FWP Area Biologist Cory Loecker at 406-454-5864. Public comment will be assessed and a decision notice will be announced based on comment received.

Sincerely,

Gary Bertellotti /s/

Gary Bertellotti
Region 4 Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
4600 Giant Springs Rd.
Great Falls, MT 59405

Enclosure: Cascade County Missouri River Merriam's Turkey Transplant EA

CASCADE COUNTY MISSOURI RIVER MERRIAM'S TURKEY TRANSPLANT DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. **Type of Proposed State Action:** The proposed action is to trap wild turkeys from an existing wild population in eastern Montana and release up to 75 birds in suitable habitat along the Missouri River south of Ulm in Cascade County.
2. **Agency Authority for the Proposed Action:** The action is proposed by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).
3. **Name of Project:** The name of the project is the Cascade County Missouri River Merriam's Turkey Transplant.
4. **Name, Address and Phone Number of Project Sponsor (if other than the agency):** The project sponsors are: FWP partnering with area Landowners (Appendix A) and the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf).
5. **If Applicable:**
Estimated Construction/Commencement Date: N/A
Estimated Completion Date: N/A
Current Status of Project Design (% complete): N/A The project will be conducted in January-February 2007, or whenever turkeys become available thereafter.
6. **Location Affected by Proposed Action (county, range and township):** The location of the project includes portions of the following sections (See Appendix A and Figure 1):

T17N R01W Sections: 2,3,9,10,11,15,16,17,18,19,20,29,30
T18N R01W Sections: 25,25,26,35,36
T18N R01E Sections: 2,3,4,9,10,16,17,18,19,20,29,30
T19N R01E Sections: 24,25,26,34,35,36
T19N R02E Sections: 8,9,17,18,19,20,21,29,30,31
7. **Project Size: Estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:**
 - a) developed:
Residential - ~100 acres of subdivision/housing development within the affected area.
Industrial - 0 acres
 - b) open space/woodlands/recreation - about 25 river miles of cottonwood and willow timber on Missouri River bottom with heavy brush under story from Ulm to approximately 5 miles southwest of Cascade. Total affected area equals approximately 15,000 acres.
 - c) wetlands/riparian areas - 25 river miles of Missouri River bottom land. Total affected area equals approximately 15,000 acres.

The Missouri River bottom described above is a very diverse habitat. The river and stream channels are lined with mature cottonwoods that typically have a dense under story of brush and grass species

including, buffaloberry, rose spp., hawthorn, chokecherry, etc. The river corridor is a diverse mix of irrigated and dryland alfalfa hayfields, irrigated and dryland small grain fields, irrigated tame rangeland and native rangelands. Prairie slopes adjacent to the deciduous riparian forest support scattered shrub communities such as western snowberry, chokecherry, currant, and lilac, which are commonly used for nesting by turkeys. Abundant grassland edge surrounding the deciduous habitat will provide brood-rearing cover by supporting invertebrates for poults. Roosting habitat is adequate with large diameter trees with good horizontal branching occurring throughout the corridor. The prevalent Chinook winds should keep winter foods available for wild turkeys during most of the winter. The total area encompasses approximately 15,000 acres and the habitats described above are equally distributed throughout the proposed release area.

8. **Map/site plan: attach an original 8 " x 11" or larger section of the most recent USGS 7.5' series topographic map showing the location and boundaries of the area that would be affected by the proposed action. A different map scale may be substituted if more appropriate or if required by agency rule. If available, a site plan should also be attached. See Figure 1.**

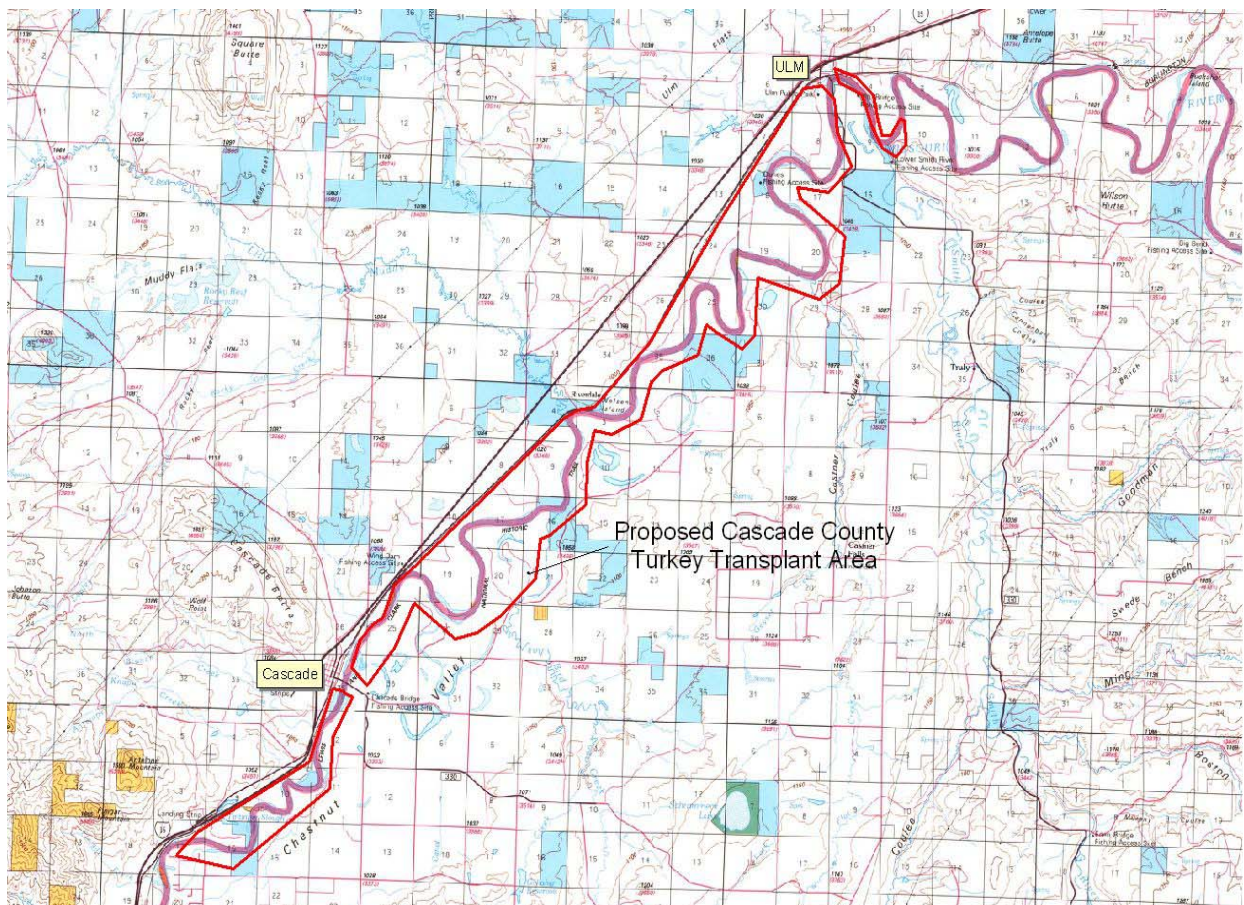



Figure 1. Proposed Cascade County Turkey Transplant Area.

9. **Narrative Summary of the Proposed Action or Project including the Benefits and Purpose of the Proposed Action:** The purpose of the project is to establish a viable population of wild Merriam's turkeys in an area where they currently do not inhabit. Partnering with FWP on the project is the National Wild Turkey Federation and area Landowners. This project will provide additional recreational opportunities to the public who has shown an increasing interest for wild turkeys in Montana. Benefits of the project include expanded opportunities for the public and Landowners to hunt/view/listen to wild turkeys, improved Landowner relations with FWP and the public, and potential added revenue to the local economy from expenditures by turkey hunters and viewers.
10. **Listing of any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction:** No other agencies have jurisdiction.
11. **List of Agencies Consulted During Preparation of the EA:** Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) was contacted regarding parcels of School Trust Land within the project area. DNRC voiced support for the proposed project.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

1. Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u>	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction,  sture loss, or over-covering of soil which would reduce productivity or fertility?		X				
c. Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other (list)						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

2. <u>AIR</u>	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (also see 13 c)		X				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. <u>For P-R/D-I projects</u> , will the project result in any discharge which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a)		X				
f. Other						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Air Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		x				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		x				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of flood water or other flows?		x				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		x				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		x				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		x				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		x				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		x				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		x				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		x				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		x				
l. For P-R/D-I , will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c)		x				
m. For P-R/D-I , will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a)		x				
n. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

4. <u>VEGETATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?		x				
b. Alteration of a plant community?		x				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		x				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?	x				yes	4d
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?		x				
f. For P-R/D-I , will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		x				
g. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

4d. Depending on how well the turkey population does, there is the potential for some type of crop damage. Based on distribution of crops in the project area and often limited crop use in other areas, the chances of reduction in acreage or productivity of agricultural land is remote. . Potential impacts can be mitigated for through directed hunting, application of game damage materials, or by purchasing food plots using the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program.

5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u>	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		x				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?			x			5b
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		x				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?			x			5d
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		x				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?	x					5f
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		x				
h. <u>For P-R/D-I</u> , will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f)	x					5h
i. <u>For P-R/D-I</u> , will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d)		x				
j. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

5b. and 5d. The proposed action will result in placing Merriam's turkeys into the Missouri River area. Diversity of bird species will increase.

5f. and 5h. Bald Eagles are common to the Missouri River drainage. It is unlikely that the presence of turkeys will result in any changes in Bald Eagle populations or their distribution.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u>	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		x				
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?		x				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		x				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		x				
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

7. LAND USE	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?			x		yes	7a
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		x				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		x				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		x				
e. Other: _____						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

7a. In severe winters turkeys may consume grain and grain crops, of which much is available in the area. All Landowners have agreed to the introduction (see attached Turkey Transplanting Agreement). Should the population expand, FWPs Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program could be used to encourage other Landowners to provide forage and/or winter cover for the turkeys. The National Wild Turkey Federation also has funding to help alleviate crop damage should instances arise.

8. RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		x				
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan or create a need for a new plan?		x				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		x				
d. For P-R/D-I, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		x				
e. Other: <u>public safety</u>			x			8d

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed)

8d. If the proposed action results in a huntable population of turkeys, the slight increase in hunting activity may pose a safety problem in those portions of the project area where housing exists. Most of the area is undeveloped and safety should not be a problem. Landowner permission is required to hunt on private land.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		x				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		x				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		x				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		x				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		x				
f. Other: _____						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u>	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:			x			10a
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		x				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		x				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased used of any energy source?		x				
e. Define projected revenue sources			x			10e
f. Define projected maintenance costs.			x			10f
g. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

10a. Implementing the proposed action and monitoring the transplanted turkeys will require some additional time and operating dollars from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. Also, some expenditures from the Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program may be required to provide improved cover and food sources.

10e. Should Merriam's turkeys become established in the project area, a small increase in sales of turkey hunting licenses may occur.

10f. Potential game damage responses are the responsibility of FWP through FWP game damage policy and procedures. Minimal operational costs in responding to game damage complaints may occur. Routine Landowner contacts throughout the year are included in normal operations budgets.

11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u>	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		x				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?			x			11b
c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report)			x			11c
d. For P-R/D-I , will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c)		x				
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

11b. and 11c. The aesthetic character of the area as well as the quality and quantity of recreational opportunities will be improved. Viewing and hunting opportunities will increase as turkey populations increase. Conflicts between those wanting to view turkeys and those who harvest turkeys may occur. However, people are generally aware that FWP expenditures of sportsmen's dollars have the objective of increasing hunting opportunities, as well as viewing opportunities.

12. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Destruction or alteration of any site structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		x				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		x				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		x				
d. <u>For P-R/D-L</u> , will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a)		x				
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

C. SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources which create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		x				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		x				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		x				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		x				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		x				
f. <u>For P-R/D-L</u> , is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e)		x				
g. <u>For P-R/D-L</u> , list any federal or state permits required.		x				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW, CONTINUED

1. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:

There are two reasonable alternatives to this proposal. No action would result in no changes and no increased aesthetic, viewing or hunting opportunities. The proposed action of introducing Merriam's turkeys to the project area can improve aesthetic, viewing and hunting opportunities. This action would be implemented by the capture of wild Merriam's turkeys, as they become available in other Montana sites, and their subsequent release in the described project area. Supplemental transplants may ensure sufficient numbers are transplanted.

2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

FWP will help to alleviate damage to haystacks caused by turkeys or other wildlife if the Landowners allow a reasonable amount of free public hunting through the FWP game damage policy and procedure. FWP will work with safety concerns and hunter management by continuing its mandatory hunter education program, and by assisting Landowners through the Block Management Program in areas with heavy hunting pressure.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The proposed action, if successful, will increase species diversity and improve aesthetic and recreational opportunities in the area. The impacts of possible damage to haystacks and hunter problems can be effectively mitigated.

PART IV. EA CONCLUSION SECTION

Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? YES / NO. If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action:

An EIS is not required. The EA Checklist is the appropriate level of analysis because the primary effects are beneficial and potentially negative effects can be mitigated. There are no significant impacts associated with the proposed action and no cumulative effects associated with other actions taken by FWP other agencies.

2. Describe the level of public involvement for this project if any and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?

This project has been discussed with the local Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, sportsmen in Cascade County and Landowners in the project area. The project appears to have widespread support and very few concerns were expressed. This project is unlikely to produce negative environmental impacts. Therefore, the level of public involvement is appropriate.

3. Duration of comment period if any: The 30- day public comment period is November 3 - December 3, 2007. Please mail comments to:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Attn: *Cascade County Missouri River Merriam's Turkey Transplant Proposal*
4600 Giant Springs Rd.
Great Falls, MT 59405
Or via Email at: cloecker@mt.gov

4. This EA was prepared by:

Cory Loecker
Wildlife Biologist
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405
(406) 454-5864

Appendix A - Landowner List

Glen Kitson
Dana Ranch
Olson Ranch
Gould Ranch
Larry Dugas
Sally Shortridge
Lloyd Maki
Tracy Mikes
Keith and Becky Olson
Standley Ranch
Voegelé Ranch
William Beecher
Bird Creek Ranch
Rumney Ranch
Lucy Pettapiece
Joseph Dormer
Carl Taft
Dan Fiehrer
DNRC